

Home Working

Working Time and Flexible Working

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Home Working

Overview

This section gives an overview of the British Council's home working scheme. Home working is a contractual arrangement whereby a member of staff works from home on a regular basis for two or more days each week. Home working is one element of the British Council's flexible working policy designed to improve the work/life balance for British Council staff.

This section covers:

- circumstances in which home working may not be appropriate
- considering a request for home working
- applying for home working
- rejecting an application for home working.

Audience

This policy applies to UK-appointed staff. It can provide good practice guidance for country/territory TACOS.

Responsibilities

Managers and staff are responsible for implementing the procedures defined in this document.

Policy

Full-time home working can only be considered in exceptional circumstances. HR Services in the UK, or the local HR manager overseas, must be consulted on any proposal, at an early stage. This type of home working is normally only suitable for staff who, on grounds of disability, family responsibilities or voluntary relocation, would otherwise be unable to continue in the British Council's employ. All aspects must be given very careful consideration before any arrangement can be agreed.

The most usual home working pattern is to work from home for, typically, two or three days each week. The policy does not cover those situations where a member of staff is based in the office but occasionally and exceptionally wants to work from home.

- All staff are eligible to apply for home working but it is not a right. Neither can staff be asked to work at home if it is not their wish to do so.
- The decision to authorise home working will be based on a number of factors. See Considering a request for home working below.
- Home workers must follow the existing procedure for notifying line managers of sick leave or requesting holiday leave.

Guidance

Circumstances in which home working is not appropriate

Home working cannot be considered if any of the following apply (except where a member of staff has a disability):

- The applicant received a transitional rating in his or her last performance evaluation.
- The applicant has an existing disciplinary warning.
- The applicant is still on probation.

Line managers may consult HR Services or, overseas, the local HR manager, for advice and support in these cases.

Home working is not a permanent solution to childcare difficulties; while they are working at home, staff must make adequate provision for their children to be cared for. Staff in the UK

may still apply for childcare vouchers when working from home, subject to meeting the usual criteria. For more information, see Childcare Vouchers Scheme.

Considering a request for home working

As a manager, you must take a number of considerations into account before you agree to home working. If in doubt, consult HR Services in the UK, or the HR manager overseas, for advice and support. The main areas to consider are:

- business case
- suitability of the job and team
- suitability of the person
- suitability of the home environment.

In the UK, special procedures exist if a member of staff is applying to work flexibly because of caring responsibilities for children under age six (or age 18 where the child is disabled). Check whether applicants for home working are in this category. If they are, follow the procedures and time-scales set out in *Parental Right to Request Flexible Working*. These are legal requirements and over-ride the procedures in this document.

Business case

The British Council adheres to best practice and encourages family-friendly/work-life balance policies, but at the same time must consider the costs. While the cost of office accommodation may decrease, through savings in space requirements and by occupying work stations more intensively, the cost to the department of equipping a member of staff's home with furniture (if necessary) and equipment, including a PC, is significant (typically £3000 in 2007, in the UK). Other costs must be taken into account, for example, increased demands on support services by the home worker, annual telephone connectivity and rental charges, and so on.

Suitability of the job and team

Roles that do not require constant access to departmental databases and documentation are more suited to home working, for example, information processing, planning, analysis, report writing and programme arranging. As manager, you must analyse jobs to identify those elements of the work that can be done at home, and those that cannot. Typical jobs that are not suitable for home working are reception, post room, some IT posts, and security and facilities management.

Consider the impact of the proposed changes carefully. That is, consider the effect on colleagues, including any staff managed at a distance by the home worker, on relationships with clients and customers, and on the team, particularly if other colleagues are already working flexibly.

Suitability of the individual

The member of staff and the line manager must both consider how the member of staff will be affected by home working. It may be useful to consider the applicant's ability in the following areas:

- resolving problems and concerns with the line manager, by telephone/e-mail
- communicating effectively with colleagues and functioning as part of a team, at a distance
- self-motivation, and working to agreed deadlines without close supervision and in relative isolation from colleagues
- managing time and organising work effectively and with self-discipline
- flexibility in work management and approach

- managing staff, where applicable
- IT skills and self-sufficiency
- coping with reduced social contact
- creating an appropriate separation between work and home life (knowing when to stop working)
- arranging family commitments to provide a suitable working environment without disruption.

Suitability of the home environment

The British Council has a statutory duty to apply the same health and safety standards to home workers as to staff working in the office. Staff applying for home working will be required to certify that they have a space in their home:

- suitable for undisturbed work
- safe, suitably lit and well-ventilated
- large enough for the PC and printer (provided centrally but paid for by the department or overseas office).

Note: In exceptional circumstances, telephone connectivity may not be possible. In such cases, it is not possible to work from home.

The member of staff must also complete a Health and Safety Risk Assessment Questionnaire to measure any health and safety risks or potential hazards. This will be followed by a health and safety risk assessment home visit conducted by a health and safety adviser from IMASS, the British Council's outsourced health and safety risk assessors. Following the home visit, IMASS will produce a health and safety risk assessment report. The line manager and member of staff must work together to ensure that any remedial action recommended by the risk assessment report is carried out in advance of home working.

Note: There may be circumstances where potential risks or hazards are considered too high for a formal home working arrangement to be agreed.

Disability

There may be particular circumstances when a home working arrangement can be set up for a person with a disability. Refer to the British Council's online policy on disability.

Procedures

Applying for home working

Staff wishing to apply for home working must discuss the suitability of their post with their line manager. The following procedures then apply:

1. The member of staff completes sections 1, 2 and 3 of the Application for Home Working form and passes it to the line manager.
2. The line manager considers the request based on the business case and consults his or her own line manager and HR Services in the UK, or HR manager overseas, before reaching a decision.
3. The line manager reaches a decision. If home working is agreed, the line manager passes the form to HR Services in the UK, or the local HR manager overseas, for recording. This confirms that the application is being monitored, and once the member of staff begins to work from home, HR Services, or the HR manager overseas, arranges for the home working allowance to commence and for the employment contract to be revised as appropriate.

If the line manager does not agree to the request, he or she must explain the decision to the applicant. See Rejecting an application for home working below.

4. If home working has been agreed:
 - In the UK, the member of staff completes a change request form and contacts their Global IS account manager who will help them through the process and advise them on setting up with a broadband provider.
 - In the UK the member of staff completes a Health and Safety questionnaire and sends it to IMASS - Occupational Health Provider in the UK for Health and Safety assessment. If in doubt where to send then contact Global Estates, Health and Safety Manager.
 - Overseas, the local HR manager passes the form to the appropriate sections (Facilities/Resources) to arrange for ordering IT equipment and furniture if required, and a Health and Safety risk assessment.
5. Global IS sends a cost estimate to the line manager.
6. IMASS in the UK, or Facilities/Resources section in an overseas office, confirms a date for a home visit to do a risk assessment. Note: The costs for Health and Safety risk assessment are met by the relevant department where the member of staff is based.
7. IMASS in the UK, or the relevant Facilities section in an overseas office, completes the final section of the form, recording the date of the home visit, and returns it, together with a Health and Safety risk assessment report, to the line manager, copied to HR Services in the UK, or the local HR manager overseas.
8. Furniture (if required) and computer equipment, which remain the property of the British Council, are installed in the home worker's home. See Setting up the Home Office.
9. Once all of the above arrangements have been concluded, HR Services in the UK, or the local HR manager overseas, prepares a Home Working Contract Letter. Note: The contract letter applies for one year, and must be reviewed annually alongside the annual performance review. Home workers must follow the existing procedure for notifying line managers of sick leave or requesting holiday leave.
10. The line manager and member of staff agree a revised job plan. The letter and plan detail all aspects of the home working arrangement to ensure that both sides are aware of what is required, and that everything is in place to make the arrangement successful.

Rejecting an application for home working

If, as line manager, you reject an application, you must explain the reasons to the member of staff, in writing. If the member of staff disagrees with your decision to reject the application, the member of staff must follow the appeals procedure, informally in the first instance. Refer to Grievances and Appeals.

Setting up the Home Office

Overview

Home working is one element of the British Council's flexible working policy designed to improve the work/life balance for British Council staff. This section describes setting up the home worker's office and working environment.

This section covers:

- health and safety
- security
- insurance, mortgages and tenancy agreements
- the work area
- setting up equipment and procedures
- office equipment and furniture
- recommended furniture package (UK)
- storage.

Audience

This policy applies to UK-appointed staff. It can provide good practice guidance for country/territory TACOS.

Responsibilities

Managers and staff are responsible for implementing the procedures defined in this document.

Guidance**Health and safety**

The British Council is committed to ensuring that employees are safe wherever they work. The Health and Safety team in Global Estates in the UK, and the local Facilities/Resources section overseas, can provide general advice to prospective home workers. As a home worker, you must complete the Health and Safety Risk Assessment Questionnaire, and return it to the relevant line manager, with a copy to IMASS in the UK, or the local Facilities/Resources manager overseas. The questionnaire enables the suitability of your proposed workplace, furniture and equipment for home working to be assessed. An inspection of the home working site is required to assess suitability and fitness for purpose.

You must also refer to the online VDUs: Health and safety briefing, which provides general advice on working with computers and a guide to manual handling.

All home workers must have training on health and safety awareness.

Security

Physical security of the proposed home office area forms part of the health and safety assessment procedure. It is the joint responsibility of the member of staff and the line manager to ensure that any adaptation required be completed before home working begins. However, ongoing responsibility for following security procedures diligently rests with you, as the home worker.

Where possible, you must be able to secure the location for your home office separately from the rest of your home when you are not present. All parties must be aware of the increased risks (for example, theft or criminal damage to British Council-owned equipment and data, and risks to the personal safety of staff) associated with home working, and must take all reasonable steps to minimise these. In some cases, installing alarm systems or panic buttons may be appropriate.

As the home worker, it is your responsibility to ensure that all normal data protection requirements are complied with, that there are no breaches of confidentiality within the domestic environment, and that there is no inappropriate personal use of equipment supplied by the British Council, including the telephone line. In particular, no-one other than the authorised home worker may use IT equipment owned by the British Council.

You must be aware of the Standards for use of British Council IT equipment and systems.

Insurance, mortgages and tenancy agreements

As a home worker, you must write to your mortgage provider or landlord to say that you will be working from home (see Mortgage supplier/tenancy letter). Check your mortgage or tenancy agreement to ensure that your occupation of your home is not subject to terms and conditions or covenants that prevent home working. Specifically, you must ensure that your building/contents insurance is not invalidated by the using the premises as a place of work, or by using British Council equipment.

If significant structural work is envisaged to adapt your home for flexible working, you may need planning permission from the local authority (in the UK). This is your responsibility, and the British Council does not contribute to any costs incurred.

The British Council remains responsible for any loss of, or accidental damage to, equipment and furniture officially supplied, provided that this does not result from negligence on the part of you or your family members, and that security procedures have been complied with (see Security above).

You must avoid having meetings with customers or clients in your home, and must arrange such meetings at a convenient café, restaurant or other suitable environment instead. You may not be covered for accidents to colleagues or clients entering your house on business; check this point with your insurance company.

The work area

There should be a dedicated and physically separate work area within your home. If this is not possible, the working area must be a quiet one where there is little risk of interruption from other members of the household. A minimum area of 6.5 square metres is required for the installation of appropriate home office furniture (see Office equipment and furniture below). Report to your line manager any changes to the work area which make it less secure or less suitable for home working.

Setting up equipment and procedures

It normally takes at least three months to set up practical home working arrangements. This process includes:

- consulting with HR Services in the UK, or the local HR manager overseas
- consulting with IMASS and Global IS in the UK, or the relevant Facilities/Resources sections of the office overseas
- ordering and installing the appropriate IT solution, including IT connectivity
- ordering and installing office furniture, if required
- taking part in any necessary training (for example, Health and Safety, Global IS on line resources)
- the agreement and full understanding, by all parties, of the procedures for reporting and resolving problems (for example, equipment failures, accidents, and so on).

A period of adaptation is often required for home working to work successfully. This period also allows you time to obtain any necessary clearances from mortgage lenders, landlords, home insurance companies and so on (see Insurance, mortgages and tenancy agreements above), and to make any other relevant changes to your domestic arrangements.

Office equipment and furniture

The British Council provides a chair, desk, and lockable filing cabinet if required, and these remain British Council property. As a home worker, you can order the recommended package (see Recommended furniture package (UK) below) through Office Depot, and the costs will be met by your department.

Overseas offices are responsible for providing furniture for overseas home workers and must, wherever possible, follow the guidelines in [Recommended furniture package \(UK\)](#) below to ensure consistency.

Global IS in the UK, or the local IT section overseas, supplies and installs the IT and communications equipment required for GTI. Global IS support is available through the CIT Help Desk in the UK, or the local IT support network if overseas. Home workers must ensure they have been on the relevant Global IS training.

The administration manager for your department must ensure that an up-to-date inventory is maintained for extra equipment provided at the British Council's expense. As a home worker, it is your responsibility to ensure that the equipment is kept in good working order and to report any faults promptly. If the home working arrangement is terminated for any reason, all furniture and equipment must be returned to the British Council.

Ordering recommended office furniture (UK)

Once a Health and Safety risk assessment has been completed, you can order the recommended furniture from Global Estates. Please see Office Depot Order form and Office Depot Ordering Guidelines and Statement of Work.

Storage

Work papers and files for use at home must be kept secure and organised to keep storage requirements to a minimum. Avoid duplicating files and other materials in your home office and main office, if possible. Do not leave confidential material in view when your work area is unoccupied; you must lock such material away when you are not using it, and dispose of it securely, in the main office, when you no longer require it. This includes data on computer disks, Cds, DVDs and USB memory sticks. Please see Global IS yellow card on Acceptable Staff Usage Policy.

Home Working Agreement and Plan

Overview

Home working is one element of the British Council's flexible working policy designed to improve the work/life balance for British Council staff. This section describes the formal home working arrangements put in place when it has been agreed that a member of staff can be a home worker.

This section covers:

- reviews
- communication and contact
- performance management
- working patterns
- pay
- notice periods
- changes of circumstances
- tax issues
- visitors
- costs.

Audience

This policy applies to UK-appointed staff. It can provide good practice guidance for country/territory TACOS.

Responsibilities

Managers and staff are responsible for implementing the procedures defined in this document.

Policy

Reviews

All home working arrangements are subject to an initial three-month formal review, and quarterly reviews thereafter, alongside performance reviews.

Communication and contact

Managers and staff have the same responsibilities when a member of staff works at home as they do when the member of staff is based in the office. Both the line manager and the home worker must ensure in advance that a clear structure for necessary communication and support is set up so that the home worker does not feel isolated:

- An acceptable preferred frequency of contact for both the manager and home worker must be agreed, with a minimum of one face-to-face meeting each month.
- Additionally, as part of the home working agreement, home workers must understand and accept that they may be required to attend meetings or other functions in the office on the days they would normally work at home.
- Line managers must ensure that home workers keep themselves up-to-date with British Council written and electronic communications, for example, the Bulletin, newsletters, intranet and so on.
- Members of staff must be encouraged to actively keep themselves informed of career and training opportunities through the intranet and through discussion with colleagues and their line manager. Office-based team members must be briefed to ensure that any communication in the workplace is duplicated for home workers (for example, by email) so that home workers are not excluded.
- Communication with clients and customers must be maintained to the same standards as for office-based staff.

Performance management

Home workers work mostly without supervision, so they must be managed using defined and measurable outputs, agreed before home working begins. Regular job reviews are essential to check that the arrangements are working satisfactorily.

The line manager and member of staff must agree to hold at least two performance review meetings each year, in addition to regular feedback, to evaluate work completed. These meetings must be conducted face-to-face and on office premises. Performance reviews must focus on outputs, objectives achieved, and staff development. Home workers must be accorded the same opportunities for training, career and personal development as other members of staff.

Working patterns

Working patterns remain broadly the same for home workers as for office-based workers. The British Council's flexible working hours scheme is designed to allow staff to adapt their working patterns to meet their personal needs, while fitting in with the British Council's operational requirements. See Working Time and Flexible Working for more details.

Line managers may agree a pattern of work outside the limits imposed by the formal scheme if operationally practicable. It is important to note however, that support services will not be available where, for example, evening or weekend working is agreed. Furthermore, some services may not be accessible during weekends and evenings when routine maintenance is being carried out.

Pay

The home worker's salary remains unchanged.

In the UK, home working staff previously receiving the London Market Allowance will continue to be entitled to this allowance, provided they are required to attend the London office, as their main office, for regular meetings with their line manager and other colleagues.

Notice periods

Either party may terminate the home working agreement after the first three months by giving one month's notice. As soon as termination is agreed, the line manager must contact Global Estates and Global IS in the UK, or the Facilities section of the office if overseas, to arrange the removal of any furniture and equipment provided by the British Council. However, because setting up a home worker is costly, it is expected that the agreement will be for one year in most cases. Connectivity will usually be for a minimum of one year.

Changes of circumstances

If your circumstances as a home worker or those of the British Council change, the arrangement may need to be reviewed. A review would be appropriate if:

- The nature of the job changes and it is no longer suitable for home working.
- There is a change within the team which requires a review of each member's role.
- Your performance requires discussion, for example, relating to a particular task or piece of work.
- You no longer want to work at home because of a change of circumstances.
- You need to change the number of hours or days worked at home.
- You are moving house (in this case, you must submit a new application, and the suitability of the proposed new premises must be assessed, and connectivity will need to be re-contracted).
- Your home becomes unsuitable for home working because of, for example, a change in family circumstances.
- You want to move to another post.

Note: In this case, there is no guarantee that a home working arrangement can continue within a new team, so you must agree a new home working arrangement with your new line manager.

Tax issues

As a home worker, you may be entitled to apply to the Inland Revenue in the UK, or local tax office if overseas, for limited tax relief where a room or rooms in your main residence is set aside exclusively for home working. However, by designating a room as exclusively for business purposes, you may also become liable for payment of a higher rate of tax in the UK, for example Council Tax, and to Capital Gains Tax on a proportion of the proceeds if you sell the property.

In the UK, the employee is not liable for tax on computer or other office equipment supplied by the British Council, provided that its value does not exceed £2,500 and that it is used exclusively for business purposes. The allowances payable in respect of additional utilities costs are subject to tax and National Insurance in the UK (this may also be the case overseas), and therefore will be taxed at source through the payroll. You are advised to keep detailed records of actual costs incurred and receipts.

You can obtain further information and advice from your local tax office or personal financial adviser.

Visitors

As a home worker, you must expect British Council colleagues to visit your home for the following purposes, and must provide reasonable access:

- inspecting working arrangements and equipment for health and safety reasons
- repairing and servicing IT equipment - although the default position is that IT equipment will be brought into the main office if possible for upgrades.
- managerial reasons connected with work
- checking security arrangements (if appropriate).

Wherever possible, line managers and other colleagues who need to visit you at home must ensure that they give warning before any home visits take place, and that they agree with you a mutually convenient time.

CostsTravel

Normal travel policy rules apply for all home workers. That is, routine visits to the main office will continue to be regarded as normal commuting costs and are not reimbursable. Where you are required to travel to other premises, including other British Council premises, travel and expenses will be calculated according to the current travel and expenses policy rules.

Electricity, heating, water, postal and photocopying

As a home worker, you are eligible for an allowance to cover utility costs. In the UK, this is £10 for each day of the week worked at home, up to a maximum of £50 per month. You may be required to produce evidence in the form of bills to justify costs. In the UK, the allowance is subject to tax and National Insurance contributions, which will be deducted at source through the payroll.

Overseas, an appropriate allowance must be agreed.

Whenever possible, you must use the main office postal and reproduction facilities in the usual way. You may reclaim the cost of urgent communications sent from home or through local post offices, where there is an agreed operational requirement. You must ensure that you maintain a reasonable supply of office stationery at home and must order it through the office in the usual way. You must collect reasonable amounts of office stationery on your regular visits to your main office.

Telephone rental, calls and IT connectivity

In addition to IT connectivity, you have the option of procuring an additional telephone line for business calls only. As with any British Council office telephone, the use of this equipment is subject to the scrutiny of bills received, and you must adhere to the British Council's Code of Conduct in the same way as office-based staff.

Bills must be submitted to individual departments in the UK or by the local office overseas. If you consider that your work would be more effective with a mobile phone, or that your personal security requires one, discuss this with your line manager. British Council currently contracts with Vodaphone which operates a free calling system between Vodaphone users.

Corporate IT Provision for Home Workers (UK)

Overview

Home working is one element of the British Council's flexible working policy designed to improve the work/life balance for British Council staff. This section describes the provision made by Global IS that enables a member of staff to work from home as an agreed and contracted official homeworker.

This section covers:

- access to GTI for designated home workers
- security and conditions of use
- hardware
- functionality
- installation and support services
- obtaining Global IS approval for home working.

Audience

This guidance is for all British Council staff in the UK.

Responsibilities

Managers and staff are responsible for implementing the procedures defined in this document.

Guidance

Access to GTI for designated home workers

As a designated home worker, you will have a GTI laptop PC connected to a full size keyboard, screen and mouse. This can be configured to allow you to perform tasks that you currently undertake on an office workstation. The performance of the IT connection will depend on the type of connectivity you have. The current IT connectivity is broadband.

Security and conditions of use

In addition to complying with Global IS standards of use of British Council IT equipment and systems (known as the *Yellow card*), you must use the system according to the instructions provided by Global IS in the GTI training course and guidance document.

Hardware

In common with GTI users in the office, you may use only the approved hardware as provided by Global IS. Your own personal computer cannot be used to access GTI. GTI laptops are for work use only and must not be used by anyone else, for example, by family members. As a home worker, you have the option of purchasing an additional telephone line for work phone calls, and work IT connectivity.

For details of the Homeworking package and costs, contact your Global IS Account Manager.

Functionality

You will have secure access to G:\ and H:\ drives, email, the standard office desktop packages, and any additional approved work software.

Installation and support services

You must route any problems or requests for advice through the Global IS Help Desk (internal extension 5555, external number 020 7389 4341), or by e-mail. Obviously, the added distance impedes Global IS's ability to physically repair or replace faulty equipment.

Procedures

Obtaining Global IS approval for home working

Please note that the approval process is triggered by completing a change request form and the whole process can take 3-6 months to install a working system in a home worker's home. In the UK, the sequence is:

1. The line manager consults with HR Services before approving the business cost for home working and its funding.
2. Global IS confirms the feasibility of the request before giving approval.
3. The home worker/line manager submits a change request, on a Change Request form (CR), to the Change Request mailbox at UK-Global IS Change Request Mailbox. Consult your Global IS Account Manager before submitting this. The CR must state :
 - the target date
 - any special equipment needs, for example, printer type, scanner, and so on
 - the home worker's full street address
 - contact details
 - details of the home worker's existing phone/broadband connections.
4. The home worker completes a Health and Safety self-assessment (the Health and Safety Risk Assessment Questionnaire) for the intended location.
5. IMASS arranges a physical site survey and submits a report before the installation of any IT equipment.
6. Global IS sends a costing estimate to the line manager.
7. Furniture if required is delivered and assembled.
8. IT equipment is delivered.
9. Global IS visits the premises to set-up the IT equipment.